Role of Media in Increasing Violence against Women and Girls in the Society

Dr. OM Prakash Yadav¹, Dr. Lohans Kumar Kalyani²*

¹Assistant Professor, Department Education, Shri Lal Bahadur Shastri Degree College, Gonda (U.P)
²Assistant Professor, Department of B.Ed., Shri Lal Bahadur Shastri Degree College, Gonda, (U.P)

*Email: lohanskalyani@lbsdc.org.in

ABSTRACT

This research article critically examines the role of media in perpetuating and potentially exacerbating violence against women and girls. It analyses various forms of media, including news, advertising, film, television, and social media, to explore how the representation of women can contribute to a culture that normalizes and even encourages gender-based violence. Using a theoretical framework that combines feminist theory and media studies, the article highlights the ways in which media can reinforce harmful stereotypes, objectify women, trivialize violence against women, and promote rape myths. Additionally, the article delves into the potential psychological and social impacts of these media portrayals on both individual attitudes and societal norms. Finally, the article offers recommendations for media professionals, policymakers, and the public to address the issue of media-driven violence against women and girls.

Keywords: media representation, violence against women, gender-based violence, feminist theory, stereotypes, objectification, rape myths.

Introduction

Violence against women and girls (VAWG) is a pervasive global issue, constituting a severe violation of human rights. The World Health Organization (WHO) defines VAWG as "any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual or mental harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life." (World Health Organization, 2021). VAWG encompasses diverse forms of violence, including domestic violence, sexual assault, rape, femicide, female genital mutilation, and human trafficking. While the root causes of VAWG are complex and multifaceted, the media plays a significant role in shaping public perceptions and attitudes about gender roles, relationships, and violence. Unfortunately, media portrayals of women and girls frequently perpetuate harmful stereotypes, objectify their bodies, and
normalize violence against them. These representations can contribute to a social climate in which VAWG is tolerated, excused, or even glamorized.

This research article aims to shed light on the complex relationship between media representation and VAWG. It will draw upon feminist theory, media studies, and empirical research to explore the following questions:

- How does the media perpetuate harmful stereotypes and objectify women?
- In what ways does the media trivialize violence against women or promote rape myths?
- What are the potential consequences of these media portrayals for societal attitudes and behaviours?
- What strategies can be employed to promote more responsible and gender-sensitive media representations?

**Background**

The media wields significant power as a key architect in shaping public perceptions and influencing social norms surrounding gender and violence. Unfortunately, media representations of women and girls frequently contribute to a societal environment where violence against them is normalized and perpetuated. These problematic dynamic warrants critical examination.

The persistent objectification of women in media is a central concern. Advertising, film, television, music videos, and news outlets often reduce women to their physical attributes, placing undue emphasis on their appearance as the primary determinant of their worth. This commodification of women's bodies dehumanizes them, subtly fostering a climate where violence against them seems less egregious. Objectification implicitly undermines women's autonomy and consent, contributing to a culture of acceptance for violations against them.

Moreover, the manner in which acts of violence against women are portrayed in media is deeply troubling. Physical, sexual, and psychological abuse are often minimized, romanticized, or deployed as devices for entertainment or shock value. News narratives may subtly shift blame toward the victim or focus on the perpetrator's motivations, while fictional narratives might downplay the severity and lasting consequences of violence. This serves to normalize violence against women and cultivate a societal tolerance for these destructive behaviours.

The historical context of media representation is essential to consider. Widespread gender inequality is both mirrored and amplified by the media. The persistent underrepresentation of women in decision-making and creative roles within media institutions contributes to a predominantly male perspective shaping narratives surrounding women and violence. This can solidify patriarchal structures and misogynistic beliefs that lie at the core of violence against women and girls.

Repeated exposure to media that normalizes or eroticizes violence against women has well-documented detrimental effects on audiences. Desensitization is a serious concern, leading to reduced empathy for victims and a distorted perception of the prevalence and severity of this issue. Cultivation theory posits that heavy consumption of media shapes individual worldviews; this reinforcement of harmful representations can lead to the acceptance of violence against women as an inevitable social reality.
However, a shift is underway. Movements advocating for responsible and diverse media representation are growing in influence. Alternative narratives that portray complex female characters are increasingly visible, demonstrating the power of media to promote positive social change. Critical media literacy initiatives, designed to educate audiences about deconstructing harmful representations, hold promise for breaking the cycle of normalization.

Transforming the media landscape demands a multifaceted approach. Dismantling harmful stereotypes, championing narratives with empowered female characters, and challenging the perpetuation of violence against women in media representation are crucial to this project. Such reforms have the potential to influence societal attitudes, reduce societal tolerance for gender-based violence, and cultivate respect for the dignity and rights of women and girls.

**Theoretical Framework**

This analysis is grounded in feminist theory, which emphasizes the ways in which media often reflect and reinforce patriarchal power structures. Feminist scholars argue that the media play a crucial role in constructing and maintaining gender inequality by perpetuating stereotypes that cast women as passive, submissive, and dependent on men. Media representations frequently position women as objects of desire rather than as complex individuals with agency and autonomy (Kilbourne, 2010). Furthermore, media studies provide valuable insights into how media representations shape our understanding of the world. Research in this field suggests that media exposure can influence individuals' beliefs, attitudes, and behaviours through processes such as cultivation theory, social learning theory, and priming (Morgan et al., 2009).

**Media Representations and Violence Against Women**

**Harmful Stereotypes and Objectification**

Media representations of women are often rife with harmful stereotypes that undermine their agency and reinforce traditional gender roles. Women are commonly depicted as primarily concerned with their appearance, relationships, and domestic duties. In contrast, men are typically portrayed as powerful, assertive, and career-driven. These limited and stereotypical portrayals can contribute to the perception of women as inferior to men and deserving of less respect and autonomy.

Additionally, women are routinely objectified in the media. Their bodies are presented as objects for the male gaze, with a focus on their sexual attractiveness rather than their intelligence, capabilities, or personality. This objectification can lead to the dehumanization of women, making them seem more like disposable objects than individuals with inherent worth and dignity (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997).

**Normalization and Trivialization of Violence**

The media often depict violence against women in a way that normalizes or trivializes it. News reports may focus on sensationalistic aspects of violent crimes or use language that minimizes the perpetrator's culpability, such as describing a rape as a "sexual encounter." Entertainment media, including films, television shows, and video games, frequently feature scenes of violence against women as a form of
spectacle or entertainment. This can desensitize viewers to VAWG and make it seem like an ordinary or even acceptable occurrence.

**Promotion of Rape Myths**

Rape myths are false beliefs about rape, victims, and perpetrators that serve to excuse or justify sexual violence (Burt, 1980). The media plays a significant role in perpetuating these harmful myths. For example, news reports may focus on the victim's behavior or clothing rather than the perpetrator's actions, implying that the victim is somehow responsible for the assault. Fictional entertainment media commonly depict rape scenes in which the victim initially resists but eventually appears to enjoy the assault, or where the perpetrator is portrayed sympathetically. These representations reinforce the dangerous myths that women secretly desire sexual violence or that perpetrators are not fully responsible for their actions.

**Consequences of Negative Media Portrayals**

Exposure to media content that portrays women in stereotypical, objectified, or violent ways can have several harmful consequences. Research suggests that such exposure can contribute to:

- **Internalization of harmful stereotypes:** Individuals may internalize the demeaning and limited portrayals of women they see in the media, leading to lower self-esteem, negative body image, and a belief in traditional gender roles (Hefner et al., 2019).

- **Acceptance of violence against women:** Repeated exposure to media violence against women can desensitize viewers and increase their tolerance for real-world VAWG (Ward, 2016).

- **Justification of male aggression:** Media portrayals that link masculinity to dominance and aggression can lead some men to believe that it is acceptable to use force and control against women (Murnen et al., 2007).

- **Victim-blaming:** Individuals who are exposed to media content that promotes rape myths may be more likely to blame victims of sexual assault for their experiences (Garfield & Moreno, 2019).

**Case Studies**

To illustrate the real-world implications of these issues, here are a few case studies:

- **Advertising:** Studies have shown that advertising frequently objectifies women's bodies by featuring them in sexually suggestive poses, fragmented, or dressed in revealing clothing (Kilbourne, 2010). This objectification is linked to increased acceptance of VAWG and decreased empathy for victims (Langhinrichsen-Rohling et al., 1998).

- **Music Videos:** Many popular music videos portray women as sexual objects for men's pleasure, with graphic themes of violence and domination. Studies link exposure to degrading music videos to the justification of rape (Kalof, 1999).

- **Violent Video Games:** Violent video games often feature themes of aggression against women, with female characters serving as targets, rewards, or background decoration. Research suggests a possible connection between violent video games and increased aggressive behaviour, particularly toward women (Anderson et al., 2010).
Counteracting Harmful Media Representations

Combating the negative impact of media portrayals of women requires a multifaceted approach involving media professionals, policymakers, educational institutions, and the general public. Here are some key strategies:

- **Promote responsible media practices:** Media professionals need to become more aware of the potential impact of their work and take steps to create more balanced and respectful representations of women. This involves avoiding harmful stereotypes, objectification, and the trivialization of violence. Additionally, portrayals of sexual assault should always be handled with sensitivity and respect for victim experiences.

- **Media literacy education:** Educational initiatives should aim to cultivate critical thinking skills among media consumers, particularly young people. Media literacy programs can help individuals understand how media messages are constructed, identify harmful stereotypes and biases, and challenge representations that perpetuate VAWG.

- **Support for ethical and feminist media:** Consumers can support media outlets and creators that promote gender equality and respectful portrayals of women. This may involve choosing independent media, smaller content creators, or alternative platforms that are less driven by exploitative imagery.

- **Public awareness campaigns:** Public awareness campaigns can raise consciousness about the link between media representations and VAWG. These campaigns can challenge harmful stereotypes, promote positive role models, and encourage media professionals to adopt more responsible practices.

**Limitations and Further Research**

It is important to note that media exposure is just one risk factor for VAWG. Societal attitudes, structural inequalities, and individual experiences also play significant roles. More research is needed to explore the interplay between media and other factors in influencing beliefs and behaviours related to VAWG. Nonetheless, there is substantial evidence that responsible media portrayals are essential to counter this global issue.

**Conclusion**

This research illuminates the insidious ways in which media representations can contribute to the normalization and perpetuation of violence against women and girls. The pervasive objectification of women, the romanticization or trivialization of violence against them, and the obscuring of its profound consequences all serve to cultivate a climate of societal tolerance towards these harmful behaviours. Nevertheless, the media holds immense transformative potential. The dismantling of harmful stereotypes, the amplification of narratives that foreground female autonomy and resilience, and the unflinching representation of the consequences of violence offer a powerful counter-narrative. Championing women's leadership and diverse voices within the media industry is crucial to ensure more nuanced and empowering representations take shape.
This research underscores the urgent need for widespread critical media literacy initiatives. Empowering individuals to deconstruct media messages, identify the mechanisms through which violence against women is normalized, and understand the complex interplay between media and societal attitudes is a vital step in fostering a more informed and critical audience.

While media represents only one contributing factor to the complex issue of violence against women, its influence cannot be overstated. Demanding accountability from media creators, coupled with educational interventions and systemic shifts addressing gender inequality, offers the most effective path forward. Through collective commitment to responsible, diverse, and empowering media representation, we can work towards a society where women and girls are safe, respected, and free to thrive without the spectre of violence.

Reference:

[1]. kfacc.org/members/resources/
[6]. https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC7556255/
[7]. file:///C:/Users/Dell/Downloads/Violence_Against_Women_and_the_Role_of_M.pdf

Cite this Article:

Dr. OM Prakash Yadav, Dr. Lohans Kumar Kalyani. “Role of Media in Increasing Violence against Women and Girls in the Society” International Journal of Scientific Research in Modern Science and Technology (IJSRMST), ISSN: 2583-7605 (Online), Volume 3, Issue 2, pp. 21-26, February 2024.

Journal URL: https://ijsrmst.com/
DOI: https://doi.org/10.59828/ijsrmst.v3i2.183